

Message Text

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TAGS: MARR, AUS, XO

SUBJ: AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC AND OFFICIAL PERCEPTIONS OF U.S. INDIAN
OCEAN POLICY

REF: A) STATE 183372; B) CANBERRA 4697; C) CANBERRA 4527;

D) CANBERRA 5439

1. AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC AND OFFICIAL PERCEPTIONS OF U.S. INDIAN

OCEAN POLICY (REF A) HAVE BEEN ONLY RARELY EXPRESSED OVER PAST
TWO MONTHS SINCE REPORTS OF U.S. USE OF COCOS FOR RECONNAISSANCE
FLIGHTS (REFS B AND C). VISIT OF GROUP FROM UN COMMITTEE OF
24 TO COCOS AUG 8-11 OCCASIONED FLURRY OF PRESS STORIES, BUT
FOCUS WAS ON SITUATION AT COCOS ITSELF, RATHER THAN ON LARGER
ISSUE OF INDIAN OCEAN POLICY (SEE ALSO REF D).

2. TESTIMONY BEFORE SENATE ARMED SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE IN LATE
JULY BY DCI WILLIAM E. COLBY WAS COVERED IN AUSTRALIAN MEDIA
AUG 5, BUT ONLY EDITORIAL COMMENT WAS IN NEWSPAPER THE AUSTRALIAN
AUG 5, WHICH STATED THAT "DIEGO GARCIA BASE STILL MAKES SENSE"
ADDING, "IN AUSTRALIA THERE ARE PLENTY OF SUPPORTERS
FOR A DIEGO GARCIA BASE. ELECTORAL MISFORTUNE HAS COST THEM THEIR
POLITICAL SPEARHEAD, THE DLP, BUT THEY STILL HAVE ARTICULATE
SPOKESMEN WHO ARGUE THE DANGERS OF ALLOWING THE INDIAN OCEAN TO
BECOME A RUSSIAN LAKE... THE AUSTRALIAN CONTINUES TO SUPPORT

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AN AMERICAN PRESENCE ON DIEGO GARCIA..." PAPER MAKES CLEAR ITS

CONCERN IS POSSIBILITY OF SINO-SOVIET HOSTILITIES WHICH MIGHT CATCH AUSTRALIA IN THE MIDDLE WITH BOTH SOVIETS AND CHINESE NEEDING AMERICAN MEDIATION, AT LEAST. "THAT MEDIATION WILL HAVE MORE WEIGHT IF THERE IS A CREDIBLE AMERICAN COMMITMENT TO THE INDIAN OCEAN," AUSTRALIAN CONCLUDES.

3. FOLLOWING REJECTION OF APPROPRIATION FOR DIEGO GARCIA EXTENSIONS IN FY1974 SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS BILL, PLUS WELTER OF CONFLICTING TESTIMONY BY ADMINISTRATION WITNESSES AND SHARP CRITICISM BY RECENTLY-RETIRED PENTAGON MILITARY AND CIVILIAN FIGURES, DFA EXPRESSED SOME PUZZLEMENT TO US OVER STATUS OF DIEGO GARCIA EXTENSIONS. WE HAVE MENTIONED THAT APPROPRIATIONS REQUEST FOR DIEGO GARCIA EXTENSIONS WOULD BE IN FY 1975 BUDGET, AND PRESS HAS DULY REPORTED APPROVAL OF REQUEST BY HOUSE.

4. COMMENT: AS DEPT AWARE, GOA HAS CRITICIZED SOME ASPECTS OF U.S. INDIAN OCEAN POLICY, ESPECIALLY DIEGO GARCIA EXTENSIONS. HOWEVER, UNTIL SOME MAJOR DEVELOPMENT OCCURS, BELIEVE THERE WILL BE LITTLE NEW ATTENTION DEVOTED TO THIS SUBJECT EITHER BY GOA OR BY AUSTRALIAN MEDIA. WESTERN AUSTRALIANS SUPPORT US INDIAN OCEAN PRESENCE AND DIEGO GARCIA PROJECT, AS DOES OPPOSITION LIBERAL PARTY PLATFORM. LABOR GOVERNMENT IS QUITE PROUD OF ITS "INDEPENDENT AUSTRALIAN INITIATIVE" URGING US AND USSR TO NEGOTIATE MUTUAL RESTRAINT IN INDIAN OCEAN. BARNARD OR PRITCHETT WILL UNDOUBTEDLY RAISE THIS MATTER AGAIN DURING FORTHCOMING WASHINGTON TALKS. DEFENCE DEPARTMENT, INCLUDING PRITCHETT, IS CONSIDERABLY MORE SYMPATHETIC TOWARD DIEGO GARCIA THAN IS DEPARTMENT FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND LABOR LEADERSHIP.
HARROP

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